



Office of Childhood

Office of Special Education

March 2026

Annual Report on Children Referred to First Steps for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA): Calendar Year 2025

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Purpose

Under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act or CAPTA (Public Law 111-320), a referral of a child under the age of three who is involved in a substantiated case of abuse or neglect must be made to the early intervention program funded by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Missouri, Part C of IDEA early intervention program is known as First Steps with oversight by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

DESE contracts with a System Point of Entry (SPOE) in ten regions throughout the state. Each SPOE is responsible for the local administration of the program, including referral, intake, eligibility determination, and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) development.

The Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS), Children's Division requires staff to refer any child under age three who meets the criteria of CAPTA to First Steps.

To better monitor the referrals under CAPTA, DESE tracks these referrals separately from other referrals from DSS. This report provides information related to the children referred to First Steps with a referral source of CAPTA or DSS in calendar year 2025.

For a map of the SPOE regions, visit the First Steps website at: <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/first-steps-spo-contact-information-region>

Children Referred to the First Steps Program

In calendar year 2025, 855 children were referred to the First Steps program by the Department of Social Services Children's Division. Of the 855 children, 520 children (60.8%) had a referral source of CAPTA, and 335 children (39.2%) had a referral source of DSS.

Of the 520 children referred with a referral source of CAPTA, 215 children (41.3%) were found eligible and reached the status of an IFSP. The remaining 305 children did not reach IFSP status due to the following reasons: 138 were Part C ineligible; 123 were withdrawn by a parent or guardian; 33 were unable to contact/locate; 6 were inquiry only*; three had moved out of state; and two were deceased.

Of the 335 children referred with a referral source of DSS, 108 children (32.2%) were found eligible and reached the status of an IFSP. The remaining 227 children did not reach IFSP status due to the following reasons: 91 were withdrawn by a parent or guardian; 77 were Part C ineligible; 53 were unable to contact/locate; three were refused by SPOE; two were inquiry only*; and one was in Part B eligibility in process.

*Referral records that were closed with the reason *inquiry only* were included in this report. Inquiry only refers to those who are only seeking more information about the program.

Active Children by SPOE Region

Table 1 represents the 520 children referred to First Steps with a referral source of CAPTA and their IFSP rates by SPOE region.

Table 1. CAPTA Referrals and First Steps Status for Calendar Year 2025

SPOE Region	Referred to First Steps	Reached IFSP	IFSP rates
Region 1 - Greater St. Louis	34	17	50.0%
Region 2 - St. Louis County	55	35	63.6%
Region 3 - Northeast	34	23	67.6%
Region 4 - Northwest	26	9	34.6%
Region 5 - Greater Kansas City	74	17	23.0%
Region 6 - Central	46	19	41.3%
Region 7 - Southwest	29	14	48.3%
Region 8 - South Central	119	43	36.1%
Region 9 - East Central	60	18	30.0%
Region 10 - Southeast	43	20	46.5%
Total	520	215	41.3%

Table 2 represents the 335 children referred to First Steps with a referral source of DSS and their IFSP rates by SPOE region.

Table 2. DSS Referrals and First Steps Status for Calendar Year 2025

SPOE Region	Referred to First Steps	Reached IFSP	IFSP rates
Region 1 - Greater St. Louis	14	7	50.0%
Region 2 - St. Louis County	34	16	47.1%
Region 3 - Northeast	15	5	33.3%
Region 4 - Northwest	20	7	35.0%
Region 5 - Greater Kansas City	65	15	23.1%
Region 6 - Central	19	7	36.8%
Region 7 - Southwest	31	13	41.9%
Region 8 - South Central	67	20	29.9%
Region 9 - East Central	35	10	28.6%
Region 10 - Southeast	35	8	22.9%
Total	335	108	32.2%

Authorizations

After parental consent is obtained for a service, an authorization is created which specifies when and how the early intervention service is to be delivered. Authorizations are displayed as services on the IFSP, and any service listed in the IFSP must be delivered. Table 3 represents the First Steps service authorizations for the 215 children referred to First Steps with a referral source of CAPTA who received First Steps services. As of February 2026, there were a total of 818 active service authorizations for the 215 children.

Table 3. First Steps Service Authorizations for Children Referred by CAPTA

Service Type	Service Authorization Count	Percentage
El Testing	212	42.8%
Special Instruction	182	36.8%
Occupational Therapy	154	31.1%
Physical Therapy	119	24.0%
Speech Language Pathology	96	19.4%
Dietary/Nutrition Services	24	4.8%
Assistive Technology	16	3.2%
Behavior Services	8	1.6%
Social Work	4	0.8%
Counseling	2	0.4%
Audiology	1	0.2%
Grand Total	818	100.0%

Table 4 represents the First Steps service authorizations for the 108 children referred to First Steps with a referral source of DSS who received First Steps services. As of February 2026, there were a total of 474 active service authorizations for the 108 children.

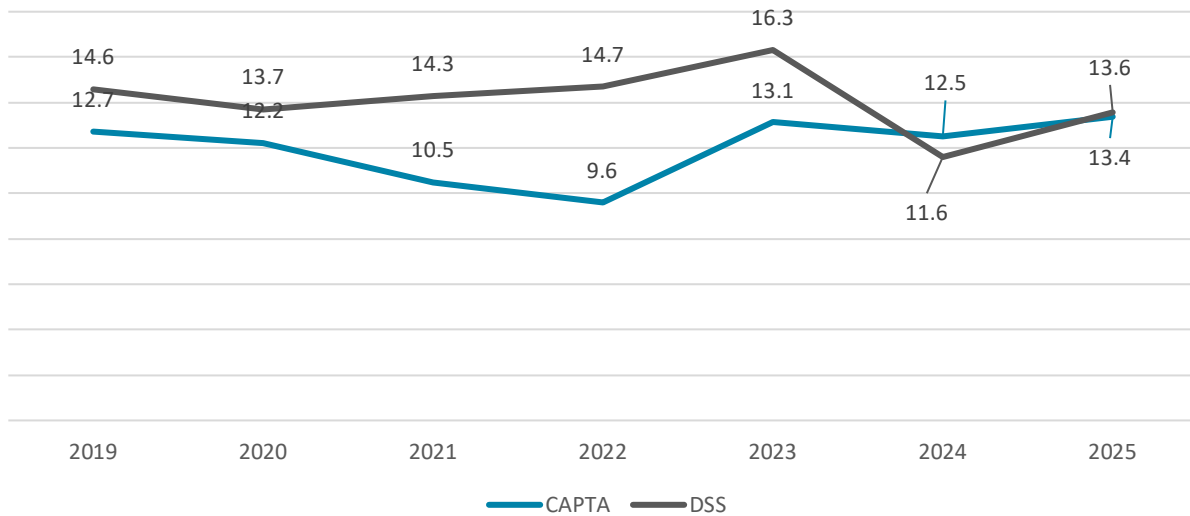
Table 4. First Steps Service Authorizations for Children Referred by DSS

Service Type	Service Authorization Count	Percentage
Special Instruction	104	34.4%
El Testing	102	33.8%
Occupational Therapy	88	29.1%
Speech Language Pathology	70	23.2%
Physical Therapy	64	21.2%
Assistive Technology	15	5.0%
Translation Services	14	4.6%
Counseling	5	1.7%
Behavior Services	4	1.3%
Dietary/Nutrition Services	4	1.3%
Vision Services	2	0.7%
Social Work	2	0.7%
Grand Total	474	100.0%

Referral Source and Average Age

Table 5 represents the average age, in months, of the 520 children referred to First Steps by CAPTA and the 335 children referred to First Steps by DSS. The average age of children referred to First Steps in 2025 was 13.4 months for CAPTA referrals and 13.6 months for DSS referrals.

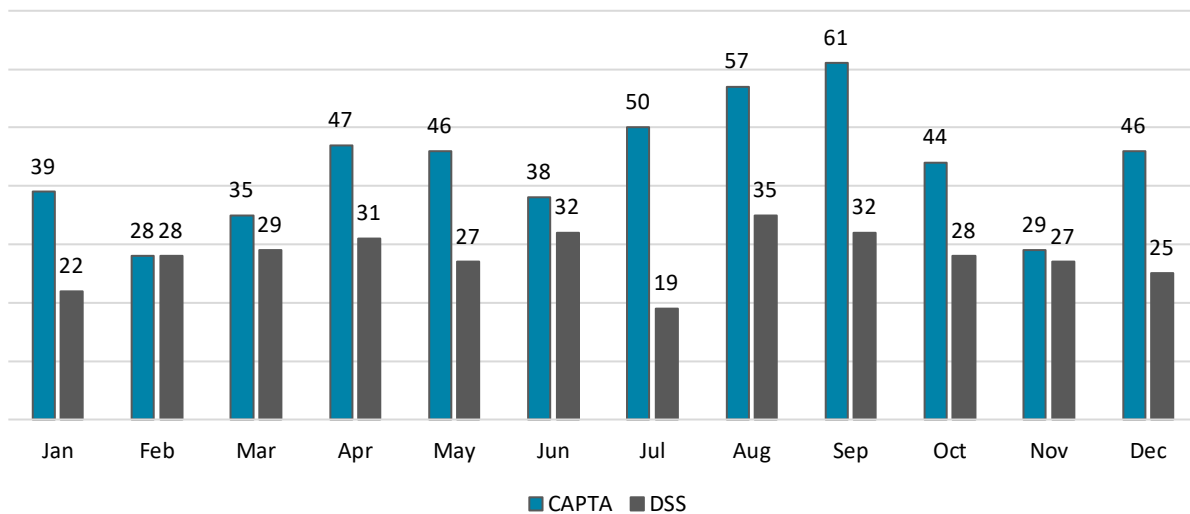
Table 5. Average Age in Months of Children Referred



Referral Source and Referral Month

Table 6 represents the number of children by referral sources and referral month. On average, 43 children were referred by CAPTA and 28 children were referred by DSS each month in 2025. The largest number of children were referred by CAPTA in September and DSS in August, whereas the smallest number of children were referred by CAPTA in February and by DSS in July.

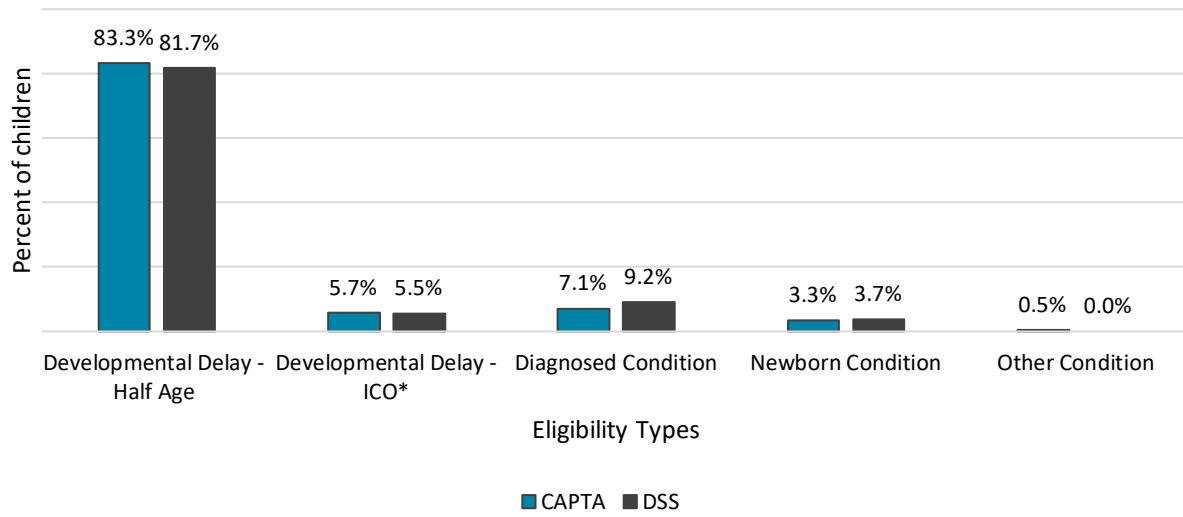
Table 6. Number of Children by Referral Source and Referral Month in 2025



Referral Source and Eligibility

Table 7 represents the percent of children who were referred by referral sources and eligibility types. Most children who were referred had Developmental Delay - Half Age; 83.3 percent in CAPTA and 81.7 percent in DSS. Approximately 7 percent of the children were referred by CAPTA and 9 percent of the children were referred by DSS had a Diagnosed Condition.

Table 7. Percent of Children by Referral Source and Eligibility



*Informed Clinical Opinion (ICO)